Of YouTube and IT

The inaugural ARIES Malaysia Business IT Case Challenge 2009 tested the analytical and communication skills of tertiary students, writes NURJEHAN MOHAMED

WHILE most would associate popular video-sharing site YouTube with entertaining clips, three undergraduates from Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) credit it as an excellent teacher.

"The videos we watched explained the concept of cloud computing clearly and that helped us a lot with our presentation," says Nursabrina Abdul Jalil, 20.

Nursabrina, and fellow teammates Mohamad Anif Adenan, 19, as well as Zeffree Kan Zainal Kan, 18, recently emerged as champions in the inaugural ARIES Malaysia Business IT Case Challenge 2009.

Fifteen teams from 11 institutions took part in the competition, organised by Universiti Kuala Lumpur student organisation Academic Research Innovation and Enrichment Society (ARIES) and hosted by Malaysian Institute of Information Technology, which aims to act as a forum for future business-IT leaders from around the country to interact with other students, academics and industry professionals (see story on page H3).

YouTube had helped the trio from UTP to understand a computing concept they have yet to encounter in their studies which assisted them in putting together a plan.

In the competition, they had 24 hours to solve a case study before presenting their findings to a panel of judges.

The case study is a real-life situation that the sales and trading department of an unnamed company is facing.

The students were to act as a consulting team hired by the firm to propose an effective information system, including IT software and hardware, that supports the department's business strategies and values.

In their proposal, the students had to identify the problems the department faced, the solutions they are proposing and the risk mitigation measures they would put in place.

Mohamad Anif, a first-year Business Information Systems (BIS) student says they had to do extra research as they had never encountered the concepts central to the contest before.

Zeffree Kan, a first-year Information and Communication Technology (ICT) student, says they were led to YouTube videos on the subject from a link in one of their reference books.

With their thorough preparation, the team was able to answer most of the questions asked by the judges in the three competition rounds.

"We didn't expect to win because none of us are in our third year unlike members of the other teams that competed," says Nursabrina, a second-year BIS student.

The trio beat another team from their institution as well as a group from UCSI University, which came in second and third respectively.

Though the other UTP team was a little disappointed at coming in second, the members were consoled with the fact that their institution was well represented in the finals and that the top prizes were so loved by fellow university mates.

Ahmad Maziz Esa, 21, a final-year ICT student thinks the competition is challenging.

"Time was the biggest hurdle," he says. His partners were Nguyen Thi Hong, 22, and Do Thi Mai Chi, 22, who are both taking BIS.
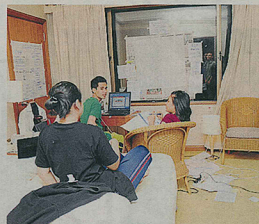
Because contestants were required to present their findings as consultants, they had to know more about the solutions they were recommending as opposed to if they were presenting for a class.

"We took turns to sleep because we needed to balance researching as well as putting together the proposal and rest so that we would still be fresh for the presentation," he adds.
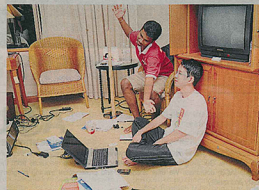
UCSI students Sara Yeap Th'eng Th'eng, 23, How Shin Yi, 22, and Ahmad H.H. Dazayi, 18, were equally chuffed about their performance during the competition and winning third place.

"We didn't expect to make it to the top four," says Yeap, a BIS student. "This is the first time we had joined a competition together and it was only because we wanted the experience."

Ahmad, also a BIS student, says

Universiti Teknologi Petronas students (from left) Zeffree Kan Zainal Kan, Mohamad Anif Adenan and Nursabrina Abdul Jalil celebrate their victory with their coach Dr Dhanapal Dominic.

How Shin Yi

Ahmad H.H. Dazayi

Sara Yeap Th'eng Th'eng

Ahmad Maziz Esa

Be able to articulate ideas

IT pays to have a good command of English when it comes to doing business in a globalised world.

"The nature of business and information technology (IT), which are closely linked, is global.

"You cannot run away from the language because of the jargon and technical knowledge," says Syarikat Perumahan Negara Bhd Human Resource and Administration general manager Rosnah Abd Ghani.

Rosnah acted as chief judge at the recent ARIES Malaysia Business IT Case Challenge 2009, which had the participation of 15 teams from 11 tertiary institutions.

The competition — organised by Universiti Kuala Lumpur student organisation Academic Research Innovation and Enrichment Society (ARIES) and hosted by Malaysian Institute of Information Technology (MIIT) — called for teams of three tertiary students to assess and solve a real-life business case study, incorporating IT into their solution, in 24 hours.

They then presented their proposals to a panel of judges made up of business people from various fields.

Rosnah says a lack of English proficiency proved to be a barrier to success for some teams.

"You may have good strategies but if you have difficulty conveying your ideas to people, they won't feel inclined to follow your plans," she says.

The competition is good training for the students as the questions posed to them during the judging were the types their clients and bosses would ask them in the workplace.

"I think universities need to start looking into making proficiency in the English language a prerequisite for IT students," says Rosnah.

MIIT dean Associate Professor Dr Roslan Ismail says the event was beneficial to IT students.

"It's critical that future IT graduates know the business

Rosnah Abd Ghani

Roslan Ismail

aspect of their job.

"Students need to have an understanding of their business whether it's banking, agriculture or forestry, for instance," he says.

Participants, especially those in IT, benefit from the challenge because it helps them understand what would be expected of them in the work environment.

Roslan intends to extend the scope of the event next year.

While the case challenge tested students' analytical and critical thinking skills, a new competition next year will showcase products and inventions of participating final-year IT students.

"This would give them an avenue to show their creativity and see where they stand among their peers from other institutions," he says.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia students Mohamad Fayadh Ahmad Kamal, Nur Rabiatul Adawiyah (right) and Siti Yusraliyana Mohd Norzan utilised all available surfaces to prepare.

Universiti Utara Malaysia students Premraj Gunalan and Tian Koon Lee ponder presentation tactics.

his team found the case study tricky; they had brought more than 10 textbooks for reference and found that they used almost all of them.

"We spent half the time brainstorming," says Yeap.

The team ended up going over their ideas twice as they had initially forgotten to take down notes.

"But it helped us during presentation time because we were quite familiar with the concepts by then," says Ahmad.

"I did not know anything about information systems strategies so the competition was a good learning experience," says How, adding it was good having teammates with different strengths.

While most of the competitors, who are in their final year, may not be able to compete again next year, Zeffree is looking forward to the 2010 challenge.

"The competition was tough but fun. I'm definitely coming back," he says.

Ahmad Maziz Esa making his presentation of the group's solution in the final round while teammates (from left) Do Thi Mai Chi and Nyugen Thi Hong look on.

Open-source server virtualization
- Resource required (No server available)
- Technical group in a data center (RM 10,54000 per year total)
- Server team (expert in UP) RM 140,500
- Four Intel dual core (RM 13,565) is flow density animus IT equipment (RM 12,000) square ft